

## **II. PARK PURPOSES**

### **MISSION STATEMENT FOR THE STATE PARKS SYSTEM**

*The North Carolina state parks system exists for the enjoyment, education, health, and inspiration of all our citizens and visitors. The mission of the state parks system is to conserve and protect representative examples of the natural beauty, ecological features and recreation resources of statewide significance; to provide outdoor recreation opportunities in a safe and healthy environment; and to provide education opportunities that promote stewardship of the state's natural heritage.*

#### **CAROLINA BEACH STATE PARK PURPOSE STATEMENT**

Carolina Beach State Park was established in 1969 to preserve the unique environment and diverse natural communities and to provide recreational activities in a coastal environment. Acquisition of the initial 291 acres for the park was funded by the first General Assembly appropriation for state park land acquisition since the purchase of Mount Mitchell in 1916. Snow's Cut, which forms the northern boundary of the park, was dredged in 1929 to connect Masonboro Sound with the Cape Fear River as part of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. A significant portion of the park land is leased from the U.S. Army.

Thirteen natural communities, including the only protected Coastal Fringe Evergreen Forest community in the state, make this one of the most diverse sites in the State Parks System and contribute to its statewide significance. Several species of carnivorous plants are found at Carolina Beach State Park, including the Venus' flytrap, found only within 75 miles of the park. The beaches, ponds and woods are all home to many animal species: birds - such as brown pelicans, ospreys and painted buntings; larger mammals - such as river otter, white-tailed deer and raccoons; and reptiles and amphibians - such as skinks, anoles and the rare eastern coral snake.

The opportunity to view many natural communities in one location and opportunities for water-based recreation are significant recreational resources at Carolina Beach State Park. Recreational uses should be compatible with the protection of the park's outstanding natural resources. Fishing, hiking, picnicking and boating are all popular activities for visitors, and family and group campsites accommodate overnight visitors. Boat ramps and amenities for boaters are provided. From the park, boaters can access the estuarine waters of the Cape Fear River and Masonboro Sound, and the salt waters of the Atlantic Ocean.

The underlying geology at Carolina Beach State Park contributes to the presence of the large number of natural communities. The dry, coarse soil of a series of stabilized east-west trending relict sand dunes of Pleistocene age hosts forests of turkey oak, live oak and longleaf pine. Dense shrub swamps called pocosins occur between the dunes. A

series of small shallow ponds are sinkholes in the Pleistocene coquina or shell limestone that underlies the park, formed when groundwater dissolves and weakens the limestone. These limesink ponds are each vegetated by a unique plant community, and the park's acidic, mineral-poor boggy soils provide the ideal environment for several interesting carnivorous plants to thrive.

Over six miles of trails and boardwalks provide the visitor with excellent places for watching birds, exploring tidal marshes and creeks, and experiencing the many natural communities and unique carnivorous plants found at Carolina Beach State Park. Locations along Sugarloaf Trail and from Sugarloaf Dune provide scenic views of the natural landscape of the Cape Fear River, several river islands, watercraft, and the mainland beyond.

Prior to European settlement, Cape Fear Indians lived in and around the area that is now Carolina Beach State Park, and artifacts of their culture that have been found here include pottery fragments, arrowheads and shell middens. In 1726, permanent colonial settlement was established and the Cape Fear River became an official port of entry for commerce, supporting the local economy of agricultural and timber products, naval stores, shipping and trade. Sugarloaf, a 50-foot high sand dune near the bank of the Cape Fear River, was of strategic significance during the siege of Fort Fisher near the end of the Civil War.

Carolina Beach State Park exists primarily for its outstanding biological, recreational and geologic resources, and also for its scenic and archaeological significance. The Division of Parks and Recreation is charged with preserving these values and providing park experiences that promote pride in and understanding of this natural heritage.

12/06